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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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1. Mideast
2. Iran

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media quoted Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal as saying on Thursday afternoon that Syria is weighing its response to an

alleged violation of its airspace early on Thursday. Maariv bannered: "On the Edge of a Flare-up." All media reported that the GOI and IDF remained silent. However, The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli defense officials as saying that Israel is "fully prepared" for the possibility of a conflict in the North. On Thursday afternoon and evening Israeli electronic media continuously broadcast news items and commentary related to the affair. (Israeli-Arab) Minister of Science, Culture, and Sport Raleb Majadele was quoted as saying in an interview with the Arabic-language Assennara (his comments were also carried by Israel Radio) that Israeli planes enter Syrian air space on a daily basis and that they may have overflown Syria to either take photographs or simply by mistake. Majadele added that this would not start a war with Syria. In answer to a question by a Channel 2-TV's correspondent, Syrian Vice-President Farouk Shara was quoted as saying in Rome that the Israeli "attack" was meant to produce tension and justify a future war. Media quoted Shara as saying that Syria does not want to be dragged into war. Ha'aretz quoted the Iranian news agency IRNA as saying that on Thursday Iran's Ambassador to Syria, Mohammad Hassan Akhtari, called Syrian defense officials, telling them that his country was prepared to give "any kind of assistance" required by Syria.

All media reported that on Thursday nine Palestinian militants and a civilian were killed in separate clashes with the IDF in the Gaza Strip. An IAF missile killed six militants from Islamic Jihad and the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades who were heading toward the border security fence in central Gaza, in what Israel said was an attempt to storm an IDF outpost or abduct a soldier.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a group of Likud, Labor, and Kadima Knesset members decided this week to join forces in support of a proposal to change the electoral system to allow for direct regional elections for a portion of the Knesset.

Leading media reported that on Thursday Hamas turned down a request by the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Ha'aretz quoted Osama Al-Mazini, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, as saying that allowing a visit might let Israel learn of Shalit's whereabouts.

Major media reported that on Thursday in the Vatican President of Israel Shimon Peres discussed the issue of the abducted Israeli soldiers with Pope Benedict XVI.

The Jerusalem Post reported that in recent days the Foreign Ministry has exchanged "strong words" with the Norwegian Embassy in Tel Aviv over a diplomatic document the embassy sent back to Oslo calling for criticism of Israel for allegedly using torture in prisons.

Maariv reported that PM Olmert is endeavoring to show the Winograd Commission that he is implementing its interim report.

The Arabic-language Kull Al-Arab reported that Professor Nadim Rouhana will head the Balad party, succeeding former MK Azmi Bishara, who fled Israel amidst allegations that he provided intelligence to Hizbullah.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that British Israelis expect HRH Prince Edward's private visit to Israel to act as a counterweight to the academic boycott of Israel.

Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted ahead of the Jewish New Year:

- "Which actions do you support in order to stop Qassam rocket fire into Sderot and the communities around Gaza?" Immediately stop supplying water and electricity following every attack: 72 percent; initiate a military operation: 60 percent; request UN intervention: 37 percent; continue the restraint policy: 24 percent; invite Hamas to negotiations: 23 percent.

- "Which problem facing Israel worries you most?" The Iranian threat: 26 percent; traffic accidents: 23 percent; the condition of education: 23 percent; the Qassam rockets: 12 percent; the economic situation: 8 percent; Syria: 5 percent.

- "How do you assess the security situation in Israel?" Bad: 72 percent; good: 26 percent.

- "Are you certain that Israel will survive in the distant future?" Certain: 74 percent; not certain: 25 percent. The rate of certainty

in Israel's survival has shrunk by one third over the past year.

A poll by the Tel Aviv local supplement of Yediot found that 46 percent of the city's residents prefer incumbent Mayor Ron Huldai to former Meretz party chairman and cabinet minister Yossi Sarid -- with 40 percent of voting intentions -- an undeclared candidate for the municipal elections due to take place next year.

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I1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "How did a situation come about in which more and more people have stopped asking if war will break out and are asking when?"

Professor Eyal Zisser, the Chairman of the Department of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University and a senior expert on Syrian and Lebanese affairs, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The status quo between [Israel and Syria] is increasingly being breached. Both sides should make an increasing effort in the future to avoid deterioration."

Arab affairs correspondent Jacky Hoogie wrote in Maariv: "Syria's hands are tied.... Israel should thank Assad for this restraint with a bouquet of flowers."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea and diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "[Vice Prime Minister] Haim Ramon is the dove that Ehud Olmert sends to the Palestinians with an olive branch in his mouth."

Block Quotes:  
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II. "Why Was Olmert Silent?"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (9/7): "At this rate, Ehud Olmert is liable to succeed where all his predecessors failed: to be the first prime minister to match Ben-Gurion. Not in successes. In wars.... How did we reach this situation? Only a few years ago Assad was willing to come to Jerusalem and relayed messages that he was willing to renew negotiations without preconditions and sent conciliatory and moderate messages to Jerusalem?.... How did a situation come about in which more and more people have stopped asking if war will break out and are asking when? And why does Israel never learn lessons before [impending] traumas? Who will head the next commission of inquiry?"

II. "Fragile Reality"

Professor Eyal Zisser, the Chairman of the Department of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University and a senior expert on Syrian and Lebanese affairs, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/7): "The announcement by the Syrian army on Thursday aroused concerns about a military clash between the two countries, concerns that seemed to be have been laid to rest in recent weeks.... In its language and content, the Syrian announcement was reminiscent of previous announcements issued by the Syrians in the wake of similar incidents that in which the Syrians warned that they would respond at the time and place that they find appropriate, but in reality they prefer to stay quiet. However, one should note that the reality prevailing today between Israel and Syria is different from that which prevailed between the two countries until the Second Lebanon War. One must hope, therefore, that both countries will know how to contain the incident, if it actually took place, and it looks like that is indeed the case. However, the status quo between the two countries is increasingly being breached. Both sides should make an increasing effort in the future to avoid deterioration."

III. "Syria's Hands Are Tied"

Arab affairs correspondent Jacky Hoogie wrote in Maariv (9/7):  
"Damascus knows well how to deny its responsibility for the assassination of a Lebanese leader, but it is not a country that would invent allegations of an Israeli operation in its territory. The reason for this is simple: such an action represents a threat to Syria's ego and it has no use in exposing it, to which one must add the firm belief that Syria is not interested in a confrontation with Israel. Thus it will not seek unwarranted provocations.... Damascus has declared that it reserves the right to respond to Israel. This was lip service to the Arab public in Syria and outside it, which has for years demanded its leaders to extract a hefty price from Israel. But because of the nature of the operation -- just an overflight of Syria, without casualties on the ground -- Syria's hands are tied.... Israel should thank Assad for this restraint with a bouquet of flowers."

#### IV. "Ramon Draws a Map"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea and diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in Yediot Aharonot (9/7): "[Vice Prime Minister] Haim Ramon is the dove that Ehud Olmert sends to the Palestinians with an olive branch in his mouth. Ramon has a plan, whose details we will bring below. He is convinced that he is acting with permission and authorization. The Prime Minister's Bureau says he has permission, but not authorization, and that everything he proposes is at his own initiative. If it works, somehow, for Israel and the Palestinians, the Ramon plan, retroactively, will become the Olmert plan. If it doesn't work, it will be Ramon's alone. This technique is known in diplomatic language as deniability. Ramon is not just proposing, he is proposing a lot.... Ramon tells the Palestinians that the moment Israel built the separation fence, it determined its border in the West Bank.... The Palestinians would be compensated for the territories they lost with identical territory inside the Green Line. Ramon talks to the Palestinians about a land corridor between Gaza and Hebron.... In the document of principles, both sides would promise, immediately after signing, to carry out the first stage of the Roadmap.... Jerusalem: Ramon, in his talks, adopts the principle that Clinton outlined in January 2001.... Refugees: This is the most complicated subject, Ramon tells his interlocutors on the other side. The document of principles will have to say that the right of return will be realized in the Palestinian state. Israel will not bring refugees inside its borders unless this is part of a quota and is defined as a humanitarian gesture."

#### 12. Iran:

##### Summary:

Arnon Gutfeld, a Professor of American History at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "All measures being taken by Russia restrict the possibility of American action against Iran, but this does not mean that any of the sides can remain nonchalant."

##### Block Quotes:

"Will Bush Attack Or Won't He?"

Arnon Gutfeld, a Professor of American History at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (9/6): "Akin to President Ronald Reagan, President George Bush has an agenda and a plan of action.... His agenda includes an attempt to eradicate the enemies of the US in Iraq; a 'long-term war' on terror; [and] the encouragement of democracy throughout the war.... However, since he was reelected in 2004, his efforts to promote his agenda have utterly failed.... But Bush -- the most ideological president to sit in the White House for the past half-century -- is determined to be a proactive president through January 19, 2009. This 'lame duck' has at his disposal a might unequalled among any mortals.... In the short term Congress and public opinion will find it hard to restrict his steps.... All measures being taken by Russia restrict the possibility of American action against Iran, but this does not mean that any of the sides can remain nonchalant. Only a week ago President Bush declared in an address to the Veterans of

Foreign Wars Convention that an Iran that strives to acquire nuclear weapons would threaten the Middle East with a nuclear Holocaust, adding, " We will confront this danger before it is too late." Is this a 'lame duck's' declaratory policy or a declaration of intentions by the superpower?"

JONES